



# In Touch South India



Headlines from the U.S. Consulate General Chennai

April — May 2007

Volume: IV, Issue: 2

<http://chennai.usconsulate.gov>

### Get in Touch

#### Main Web link:

<http://chennai.usconsulate.gov>

#### Other links:

<http://americanlibrary.in.library.net>

<http://www.unitedstatesvisas.gov>

<http://www.usaep.org>

<http://buyusa.gov/india>

#### Consulate Phone Number:

044-2857-4000

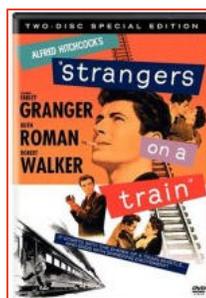
#### Consulate Fax Number:

044-2811-2020

### Upcoming Films:

#### Stories of Crime

(Bi-weekly Friday Films)



April 13<sup>th</sup>

*Strangers on a Train*

April 27<sup>th</sup>

*Dial M for Murder*

May 11<sup>th</sup>

*Kaleidoscope*

May 25<sup>th</sup>

*Bullitt*

Co-sponsored by  
Madras Film Society and  
Indo-Cine Appreciation Foun-  
dation

All films at 6:30 p.m.  
at Film Chamber Theater  
Gemini Circle Chennai - 6

Seats on a first come first  
served basis

## Black and Women's History Months

When Martin Luther King, Jr. and his wife Coretta came to India in 1959, the American civil rights movement was not yet in full swing. Dr. King said that he and Mrs. King had traveled "as pilgrims" to learn more about Satyagraha. Prime Minister Nehru was both host and tutor. On his return to the United States, Dr. King, using the philosophy and techniques of nonviolence, organized people of all races and faiths to stand together against racial injustice. Dr. King went to jail not once, but many times. His success was great if not complete. In 1968, like Mahatma Gandhi two decades earlier, he was struck down by an assassin's bullet. Also like Gandhi, Dr. King had changed history.

Injustice can be so ingrained in a society that many people fail to perceive it. Others are rendered helpless by the enormity of the task of overcoming it. Gandhi and King belonged

to neither of those camps. Neither did Elizabeth Cady Stanton or Susan B. Anthony, 19<sup>th</sup> Century fighters for women's rights in America and, early in their careers, for the abolition of slavery. They, like Gandhi and King, recognized that freedom is indivisible. Stanton, the writer and orator, said of her partnership with Anthony, the organizer and tactician: "I forged the thunderbolts, and she fired them." Once Anthony was arrested for leading a group of women to the polls; she then was barred from testifying at her own trial because of her sex. Stanton and Anthony and the many women that followed them, however, refused to be silent and, finally, in 1920 won the right to vote.

We must never forget these early struggles or the work that remains to be done. That is why every February we celebrate Black History Month and in March Women's History Month. This year the American Consulate General

*(Continued on page 2)*



Simply Woman—Poetry reading by Theater Y at the American Consulate General Auditorium.  
Photo Credit: The New Indian Express, Chennai.



Spring time is upon us once again, and last year at this time I noted that in America springtime means "Opening Day," the beginning of the baseball season. Baseball is called the American pastime, and it holds a unique and revered place not only in American sports, but in American culture and society. According to scholar Gerald Early, "two thousand years from now when they study this civilization, there are only three things that America will be known for: the Constitution, jazz music and baseball. They are the three most beautifully designed things this culture has produced." Along with many Americans, I will celebrate and my hopes for my team will be born anew when in early April the umpire says "play ball" and the first pitch is thrown.

I had hoped that in my introduction to this edition of "In Touch South India" I would celebrate the fact that not only are baseballs flying through the air, but also cricket balls as cricket's World Cup is underway in the West Indies. The lack of success for the Indian team dampens the spirits of fans here, but true fans still will enjoy the competition. More than one hundred years ago, before being surpassed by baseball and other sports, cricket flourished in the U.S. Indeed, a good piece of trivia is the fact that the first ever cricket match between two sides representing their nations is said to have been played in the U.S. in the 1840s -- between Canada and the United States. And the first English cricket tour overseas was to the U.S. in 1859.

Whatever sports our readers may follow, I wish all of you a happy spring as well as success for your teams!

**-David T. Hopper, Consul General**

Chennai organized a number of activities relating to the fight against race and sex discrimination in the United States. At Sri Padmavati Mahila Viswavidyalayam (Women's University) in Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh, Public Affairs Officer Fred Kaplan interacted with students and professors during a two-day program honoring nonviolent struggle. The Public Affairs Section of the Consulate also sponsored a local theatre group called "theatre Y," which read poems about women in schools and colleges around Chennai and in the Consulate auditorium. Many of the poems, like one by Maya Angelou, an important figure in the American civil rights movement, spoke of the resilience of the oppressed. Angelou's poem reads in part:

*You may write me down in history  
With your bitter, twisted lies,  
Your may trod me in the very dirt  
But still, like dust, I'll rise.*

The rise of American blacks and women is evidenced by two prominent candidates for nomination in the 2008 U.S. presidential race, one of whom is an African-American and one a woman. The race, which also has leading candidates from religious minorities, speaks of an America that is more tolerant than it was a century ago or just ten years ago. We are on our way toward realizing Dr. King's dream of a nation in which people are judged not by extraneous factors like race and sex, but by "the content of their character." With Black and Women's History Months, we take the measure of how far we have come and chart the course ahead.

## Expanding Access: English Language Programs

Long the lingua franca of India's educated elite, only 10% of India's population has access to English language instruction and the economic doors this opens. The hugely successful (and appropriately titled) ACCESS program is one of several recent Consulate programs expanding English language learning to a wider audience so more South Indians can take advantage of the region's burgeoning job opportunities and economic growth. By 2009, 340 high school students from madrassas across South India will graduate through ACCESS' intensive two-year English language course. The quality of instruction in ACCESS programs is superb and heralded as an unqualified success story by evaluators. Crucial to this success is teacher training, both in country and in the U.S. ACCESS students have also enjoyed summer exchange programs in the U.S. to round out their educational experience.

Casting an even wider net is English language teaching expert George Bishop, a full time consultant and English language trainer based at the Directorate of Collegiate Education, Government of Andhra Pradesh, Hyderabad. Under the auspices of the State Department's English Language Fellows program, George's goal is to advance English teaching throughout South India. From working with hundreds of schools in remote villages across Andhra Pradesh to conducting workshops for thousands of English teachers in the major cities of the South, George's efforts will undoubtedly have a ripple effect for years to come.

## Positive Images



◀ Consul General David Hopper receives his 30 year award from the only Consulate employee who has more seniority, Library Director Mr. Jagadish, who has been with the Consulate for 33 years.



▶ Escape artist performing at the MCC School, Chennai



◀ US Ambassador David C. Mulford escorting Indian Defense Minister A.K. Antony at Aero India, 2007 in Bangalore

## MUSICAL CONNECTIONS

Los Angeles-based “Ozomatli”, winner of several Grammy and Billboard Latin awards, electrified Bangalore’s Ambedkar Bhavan on February 19 with their eclectic hybrid sound that embraces North African, Arab, Latin and Hip Hop styles. Ozomatli’s ability to integrate instruments from around the



globe into dazzling jams is the core of their extraordinary musical fusion which made their high-energy fusion jam session with Carnatic musicians from the Karnataka College of Percussion a huge hit.

On another note, “Pacific Trends,” the U.S. Air Force Band of the Pacific Asia treated Chennai audiences to three classic rock and roll concerts on March 12-13 as part of their India tour celebrating the Platinum Jubilee of the Indian Air Force. Air Commodore M.S. Ahluwalia, AVSM, Air Officer Commanding, Air Force Station, Tambaram was the Chief Guest for the first concert by “Pacific Trends,” which was attended by more than 200 luminaries from the business, diplomatic, media and entertainment world. The emotional highlight of the



tour was an inspirational performance for over 700 students of the Bala Mandir School in Chennai, an institution that serves orphan and underprivileged children. Lead singer Felita Rowe’s exquisite voice and charisma left the children spellbound. On the same evening, over 600 Chennaiites filled the seats of the Government Museum Theatre clapping and cheering throughout a 60-minute musical experience that included the best of American rock and roll, jazz, pop and reggae music. However, it was “Pacific Trends” lively adaptation of the hit Bollywood song “Rock ‘n Roll Soniye” that crossed cultures and moved many in the hall to get on their feet and dance.

## Consular Corner:

### Tips for Visa Interview Day

While we have managed to reduce wait times for visa appointments from six months to just a few days, we are still working on making the time that applicants spend at the Consulate on the day they are interviewed as pleasant, and short, as possible. By following the helpful tips below, you can help us keep on schedule and allow us to process your visa in an efficient manner.

**-Arrive no more than 15 minutes before your scheduled appointment time.** Interview times are scheduled in groups throughout the day to ensure the most efficient use of our facilities. As there is very limited space outside the building to accommodate those waiting for their interview time, applicants will be most comfortable arriving just a few minutes before their interview.

**-Eat breakfast or lunch before arriving for your appointment.**

Water is available in the waiting areas, but applicants will not be allowed to bring their own food and drinks into the Consulate.

**-Choose an appointment type that meets your needs.**

Language appointments are available in all of the South India languages. Please encourage friends and family who will require interpretation services to take advantage of these appointments to ensure the best possible communication with the visa officer.

**-Schedule your visa interview well in advance of your proposed travel.**

Regardless of your purpose of travel, plan ahead. Changes to regulations allow students to appear for interview up to 120 days before the beginning of their course in the U.S.

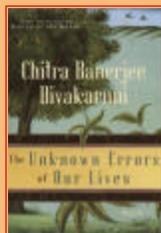
**-Both parents must appear in person when soliciting a visa for a minor child.**

If both parents are not available, the missing parent should provide an affidavit of no objection regarding the travel of the child.

**“Outside of a dog, a man’s best friend is a book. Inside of a dog, it’s too dark to read.” (Groucho Marx)**

**Saad Bokhari**  
Vice Consul

***The Unknown Error of our Lives***  
by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni



Divakaruni writes about people torn between tradition and modernity, family and the individual, and new identity formulations that one musters in the face of ever-growing change. The strength of her writing is in her ability to capture personal details of the immigrant experience. My favorite story, “The Intelligence of Wild Things,” is about an immigrant woman from India visiting her younger brother and discovering that his girlfriend is an American with “freckled skin and reddish-gold hair.” She wonders how her brother who “had never wanted to come to America” has become so Americanized while she, who agreed to an arranged marriage in order to move to America, still clings to tradition.

**Jimmy Mauldin**  
Vice Consul

***Walking From East To West***  
by Ravi Zacharias



Chennai native, Ravi Zacharias, is a prominent present-day Christian philosopher and apologist. Walking From East To West is Ravi’s life story. The book recounts his early days here in southern India, his experiences growing up as the child of an Indian diplomat in New Delhi, his own dark moments as a young adult when he tried to take his own life, and the dramatic turning point that found him coming to terms with his personal struggle between Eastern thought and the new ideas of Christianity. This book provided me with great insights into the realities of South Indian family life, and it is an inspiring story about “belief—how it begins, how it grows, and the struggles associated with it”.

## Meet Ragini Gupta



Thank you for the warm welcome Chennai! My name is Ragini Gupta and I am the new Cultural Affairs Officer here at the U.S. Consulate. My family and I are thrilled to be here during this particularly dynamic period in U.S.-India relations. My husband is the Political/Economic officer at the Consulate and in tow is the newest addition to our family -- our three month old daughter born this winter in Washington D.C. As the daughter of Indian immigrants to the U.S., serving at a U.S. mission in India is a unique opportunity that touches on both aspects of my Indian-American background. Though my parents are originally from Rajasthan, my father spent much of his childhood in Chennai and brought me to South India often as a child so I feel a special connection to South India and its culture.

Though I have not performed in many years, I have trained in the Kathak dance form and am a great fan of Bharatnatyam as well. During my college days many years ago I also acted in small local productions and retain a love of the theater and the arts in general.

Prior to this posting, I spent one year in Islamabad in the Economic Section and welcome the prospect of utilizing my Urdu language training here in India as well. Before Pakistan, I was a Consular Officer in Mexico City. Serving in one of the highest volume U.S. visa posts in the world sensitized me to the issues posed by our visa process for the many applicants seeking to travel or work in the U.S.

Before joining the Foreign Service I practiced law for seven years, five of them as a corporate litigator at large law firms in New York City and the last two practicing civil rights law involving race and sex discrimination in Montgomery, Alabama. Leaving the practice of law was not an easy decision but the honor of representing the U.S. abroad has made it all worthwhile.

In recent years we have seen great strides in relations between India and the U.S. Much attention has been paid to the visits by our leaders to each other's countries, the civil nuclear agreement and the growing economic links between us. But at the heart of all this progress are the people-to-people connections that I hope to foster, develop and deepen by working with you over the next three years. I very much look forward to learning from you and collaborating with you during my tenure here in Chennai.

## Understanding About Faith

In the last issue of "In Touch South India," we wrote about our enjoyment of the holiday season in South India and the spirit of religious tolerance and brotherhood that prevailed. We also promised to publish from time to time comments from our readers.

Below is an excerpt from a thoughtful letter written to the Consul General by Salman Babukhan of Hyderabad and Chicago about the Iftar celebrated last year in the White House.

*It is indeed surprising that the culture of organizing an "Iftar" by the highest political personalities has become a phenomenon perhaps all over the world. Knowing that it has been happening also at the White House enables the most influential people in the world to understand the true meaning of Islam. Unfortunately, Muslims and Islam have been mostly misunderstood. In recent times, some amongst the Muslims have not helped to dispel a very adverse impression of the faith. Some of our brethren are guilty of taking away the life and liberty of our own free people for inexplicable reasons, ostensibly to fulfill some political end. However, leaders of humanity must do more to remove the sense of wrong nurtured by Muslims.*

*President Bush, while welcoming the guests, said, "We are honoured to be with you once again. We are honoured to pay tribute to the month of Ramadan". The President has also shown a sense of understanding about the faith of Muslims when he said, "It has transcended racial and ethnic divisions. It has given birth to a rich culture of learning and literature and science in the Muslim world."*

Mr. Babukhan went on to describe the importance of charity, in Islam and concluded with a message of "Best wishes for the world, East and West." That is a message all of us can endorse.

### We want to hear from you!

We would like to thank the many readers who took the time to write. Your comments help make the newsletter better. Please keep writing to let us know what you like, don't like, want to see in future editions, or simply to provide your perspective on an article. Our intention in this newsletter is not only to inform our readers about the major activities of the U.S. Consulate General—Chennai, but also to provoke thought and reflection. Recent lead articles have focused on terrorism, electoral processes, religious intolerance and, in this issue, race and sex discrimination. Letters can be sent by e-mail, fax or to the mailing address given below. Letters selected for publication may be edited at our discretion and will include the writer's name and city.